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ART. XII.—*The Chenchwars; a wild Tribe, inhabiting the Forests of the Eastern Ghauts.* By CAPTAIN NEWBOLD, F.R.S., &c., Assistant Commissioner for Kurnool.

[Read June 15, 1844.]

SINCE the year 1836 I have occasionally come in contact with a singular half-savage race of aborigines in Southern India, and have lately sent them a few questions, which, with their answers, I have the pleasure to forward to the Society. The information, though scanty, is full of interest, as relating to the remnants of one of the many races that inhabited India prior to the Brahmanical invasion, by which it is more than probable they were compelled to flee to the rocks and caves for shelter, stigmatised in Hindu annals as demons and rakshasas.

They are known to the neighbouring villagers by the name of *Chenchucoolam*, *Chenchwars*, and *Chensuars*. The tract where they have fallen under my observation, lies in the jungles covering the westernmost range of the Eastern Ghaut line, extending north and south between the Pennaur and the Kistna, and known locally by the name of the Nalla and Lanca Malla. They are doubtless to be found north and south of these limits; and, if I mistake not, there are a few aborigines resembling the Chenchwars inhabiting the hilly and jungly country north of Madras.

The aborigines of the Nalla Mallas are most frequently seen by travellers in the vicinity of the wild and difficult passes that cross the chain from the Cumnum and Budwail valleys to the table lands of Kurnool and the Ceded Districts, where a few of them are employed as a hill police. The number inhabiting the tract I have described may be about 1200, but this is a mere approximation.

They inhabit clearings in the retired parts of the forest, one of which I unexpectedly entered while on a shooting excursion near Pacherloo, in the Nundi Cumnuma pass. Their village consisted of bee-hive-shaped huts, huddled together in a cleared spot, cleanly swept and surrounded by jungle. The huts had walls of wicker-work, about three feet high, and conical roofs of straw, with a sort of screen thrown in front of the low entrance. The men, nearly in a state of nudity, were lying outside, here and there, fast asleep in the sun, tired probably with watching or hunting wild beasts during the night, while the women, rather more decently clad, were preparing their food, or nursing their children near the doors of their huts. The whole resembled a Hot-tentot kraal more than anything else. A number of large dogs instantly attacked the intruder, but were kept at bay with the butt of

my gun until their somnolent masters were on the alert, and came to the rescue.

*Features.*—The women dress much in the style of the wandering female basket-makers, and resemble them in feature more than the Telugu Hindus, their neighbours. The features of the men are small and animated; the cheek-bones higher, and more prominent than those of the generality of Hindus; the nose flatter, and the nostrils more expanded. Their eyes are black and piercing; in stature they are usually lower than their neighbours. Their hair, which they wear very long, and rolled up at the back, or near the crown of the head, like that of a woman, is not the frizzly hair of the Papuan or the Hottentot, but is more shaggy and less straight, probably from exposure, than that of the Hindu; in person they are usually slightly but well formed, except about the knee, which is large, and the leg; the colour of the skin is slightly darker, and the disposition to cutaneous eruptions greater. Altogether they resemble what might be the produce of a cross between the Jacoon aborigine of the Malay Peninsula and a common Telugu Ryot of the neighbouring villages, more than any class of the human race that I can imagine or have seen.

*Language.*—They converse in Telugu, and affirm that they have no peculiar language of their own, but their pronunciation of it is harsh and peculiar; in intonation of voice and animated gesture, they often reminded me of the Malayan JACOONS. They have no written character, nor could I find a single individual who could read or write.

*History.*—They have no written inscriptions, either on stone, copper, or palmyra leaf; and no tradition of their origin, farther than that they have always understood that their ancestors have inhabited these jungles and mountains ever since the mountains were created, and that they never emigrated from any other country. The Brahmans, however, with that love of appropriation that distinguishes them, have presented me with the following legend of the origin of the Chenchwars.

Previous to the incarnation of Sri Krishna Swami, in the Dwapara Yug, (the third of the four great ages,) the Chenchwars were shepherds of the Yerra Golla caste; Obal-Iswara, the Nrisimha swami of Obalam, (a celebrated hill-shrine in the Nalla Mallas,) having taken away and kept, as a Chenchita, a maid of the Yerra Golla family, begat upon her children, of whom they are the descendants, and are consequently styled Chenchwars.

*Religion.*—They appear to have little or no idea of religion beyond

what they have picked up from the surrounding Hindus. The testimony of the Atkoor Chenchwars, as will be seen, savours strongly of Brahmanical interpolation, and embraces the leading doctrine of the metempsychosis, while the Nundial Chenchwars assert their perfect ignorance of a God or soul, and I know they are not in the habit of worshipping images, beyond attempts to propitiate some of the Hindu saktis through fear, a custom which has even extended to Mussulmans. The questions touching their religion have been imperfectly put and imperfectly answered. Better information on this head is required before any theory is built upon it.

*Customs.*—The distinctions of caste, the crimes of infanticide, sati, human sacrifice, and cannibalism, are unknown. They (such as can afford it) practise polygamy. Their marriage consists in a simple agreement before the assembled relatives and elders of the tribe. The Atkoorians state that they *burn* their dead usually; but *bury* whenever it is desired by the nearest relatives of the deceased. The Nundialites affirm that they always bury, and it appears to be the custom, as among some of the Tartar tribes, to carry the weapons of the deceased to the grave; but whether they are buried with the corpse or not, I have not yet been able to ascertain.

*Communities and Laws.*—They are divided into little tribes, or clans: in each clan there are certain heads, or elders, who decide disputes, and punish malefactors; murder is atoned for by death. Passing through the jungle near Pacheloo, I observed a skull, bleached by the sun, dangling from the branch of a tamarind tree, which I was informed was that of a murderer and hill robber, put to death by these sylvan judges, whose simple code seems to be founded upon the same principle as the *Lex talionis*.

*Dress and Weapons.*—Some of the better classes wear a cloth round their waist, short pantaloons reaching to the knees, and a handkerchief round their head, like the Hindu Kunbi; but the generality content themselves with a dirty rag to cover their nudity. The elders are distinguished usually by being armed with a spear, a hatchet, or a matchlock, while their less fortunate brethren are obliged to content themselves with a rude bamboo bow and arrow of reeds, tipped with iron. A flint and steel, and a small supply of tobacco, of which they are extremely fond, completes the Chenchwar forester's equipment. They are not remarkably expert as archers, if I may judge from the awkwardness they exhibited in dispatching an unfortunate sheep I had picketed for them at forty yards, and which was held out to them as the reward of the best marksman.

I found them good beaters, patient and docile, with a remarkably

fine eye for game in a jungle, in which they rival their brother Jacoons on the other side of the Bay of Bengal.

They keep very much to themselves and their wigwams in the jungle, are mightily proud, and, like the Highlanders of old, these *sans culotte* sons of liberty look upon weaving and the arts of civilization with the most profound contempt. They state the jungles and wilds they inhabit to be far more healthy to them than the plains; and, as a proof, aver that cholera has never penetrated to their *gudems*.

*Question.*—How many tribes of Chensuars are there in your vicinity, and what are the names of the tribes?

*Answer of Atkoor Chensuars.*—There are five tribes or *Gotrums*, viz.: 1, Wuttalur; 2, Gauraboyina; 3, Jellvandu; 4, Gulla; 5, Chella-wudru.

*Answer of Nundial Chensuars.*—There are thirty-one tribes, viz.: 1, Tota; 2, Avul; 3, Gulla; 4, Maudla; 5, Chigulla; 6, Uttaluri; 7, Jelli; 8, Chala; 9, Niniwala; 10, Gauraboyina; 11, Balli; 12, Guram; 13, Palmás; 14, Indlé; 15, Arity; 16, Jenesh; 17, Barmula; 18, Kurtuola; 19, Pusatla; 20, Gujjalru; 21, Yelpula; 22, Sangu; 23, Dasari; 24, Ravur; 25, Pulem; 26, Pulcherla; 27, Raya; 28, Chala; 29, Jamana; 30, Mundla; 31, Tatté.

*Q.*—Who are the heads of the tribes, and what are their names and titles?

*Atkoor.*—Their names are, Kanwa, Wagadu, Buchadu, Lingadu, Korti, Kanama, Nagadu, Tuppadu. They have no titles, but generally carry a matchlock, spear, or a hatchet.

*Nundial.*—We do not know their names or titles.

*Q.*—What are the names, number, and situation of your villages?

*Atkoor.*—We live in Chensu huts in the Nalla Malla Mountains in the Atkoor Pass near Nagalutri, on the road to the Parvatta shrine in the Yelyute Pass, and in the jungles near Bandinempolliam, Kotapally, Indreshwaram, Pedda Chirru, and around the hill shrine of Parvatta.

*Nundial.*—We live near the Ratan trees on the hill of Padamula Kalwa near Omkarum, on the hill of Gazupilly, and on the hill of Narrainpuram, a hamlet near Ghali Chennapolliam.

*Q.*—Are these huts fixed and stationary, or are they removed from place to place like those of the Yerukalwars and Lambadis?

*Both.*—They are not removed from place to place. From the time the Nalla Mallas were formed our ancestors have inhabited these mountains from father to son.

*Q.*—Does each village possess a "*Bárah Balluteh*?" (Hindu vil-

lage system of twelve, consisting of blacksmith, carpenter, Punchungum, &c.)

*Both.*—There is no Barah Balluteh.

*Q.*—Have you any distinction of castes?

*Atkoor.*—We have no distinctions of caste; our chiefs are only distinguished by the spear, hatchet, or matchlock.

*Q.*—Have you any fixed laws?

*Both.*—No.

*Q.*—What do you do in cases of murder, theft, &c.?

*Atkoor.*—Whenever a murder is committed all the heads assemble together and kill the murderer in return. In case of robbery, if the stolen property be discovered, or the party voluntarily restore, nothing further is done. If the thief do not restore the property, and confesses his crime, we collect from him an equivalent; and, in case he does not possess any property nothing further is done; since what has been expended cannot be recovered. Capital punishment is executed in the same manner and with the same weapon, as the crime for which it is awarded. All petty offences, such as assaults, striking one another, are punished by the heads, by beating the offender in return, and by reprimand.

*Nundial.*—In cases of murder the perpetrators are put to death in return. Thefts and assaults are punished as above.

*Q.*—How are civil cases disposed of?

*Both.*—By the heads, who assemble without regard to number, which depends on the number present in the village; and after examining witnesses and the parties, decide the question. They assemble near the *gudem* or huts.

*Q.*—Do Sati and infanticide ever take place among you, or human sacrifice?

*Both.*—Never.

*Q.*—Is polygamy allowed?

*Both.*—It is.

*Q.*—What are the usual ceremonies and customs at marriages?

*Atkoor.*—Beating tontoms, distributing betel, fruits, &c., presenting the bride with a new *rêku* (a sort of cloth like the Hindu sarhi), and a coarse *choli* or vest. The bridegroom gets a new handkerchief to tie round his head, and a *chadr*, a cloth like a shirt. The people of the tribe are all invited. We have no other ceremonies than these. A dance takes place.

*Nundial.*—Tontoms are beat, and a dance takes place.

*Q.*—What are the usual ceremonies at deaths? and do you bury or burn your dead?

*Atkoor*.—When a person dies he is lamented over by his relatives for a while: the corpse is then washed with water, laid on a bier made of the stems of the bamboo, and borne with the weapons the deceased used in his life-time,—matchlock, spear,—to the funeral pile, and burned. The relatives mourn two days, and afterwards invite the people of the tribe to a feast, with which the mourning terminates.

*Nundial*.—Same as above, but they state they *bury* their dead.

*Q*.—What are the ceremonies at births?

*Both*.—As soon as the child is born, the umbilical cord is cut, and the child is washed. On the third day the ceremony of purification is performed, by inviting all the *women* of the tribe to a feast, and presenting them with betel leaf. On the fourth an old woman gives a name to the child, which it retains over after.

*Q*.—Do you ever eat human flesh, or the raw flesh of animals?

*Both*.—We do not.

*Q*.—What species of food is forbidden?

*Both*.—We do not eat of the flesh of bullocks, buffalos, crows, kites, vultures, storks, &c. The flesh also of tigers, camels, horses, swine, and monkeys is forbidden, but we eat other animals, and drink the fermented juice of the palm.

*Q*.—Does slavery exist among you?

*Both*.—No.

*Q*.—Have you any written annals, inscriptions on stone, wood, or copper, or traditions of the origin of your race, whence it came into these jungles and hills?

*Both*.—Our ancestors have always inhabited these jungles and mountains from time immemorial. We have no history, nor inscriptions, nor any tradition of ever having come from any other country into this.

*Q*.—Why do you inhabit unhealthy forests and mountains? Why do you not live in the open plains, tilling the earth, digging wells, weaving cloths, or trading like civilized beings?

*Atkoor*.—Dwelling in hilly jungly tracts has ever been thought healthy by us and our ancestors. There the smell of other men does not reach us. In the plains the sight of other men excites fear, which engenders diseases. With regard to well digging, weaving, &c., we are not capable of these tasks.

*Nundial*.—As we have been always accustomed to the jungle, we inhabit it, because residing in open plains will cause diseases. We are loath to follow the arts of cultivation, weaving, &c., as they are prohibited, and whoever practises them is expelled from the tribe.

*Q*.—Do you ever intermarry with the Telugus or other inhabitants of the plain, or with any other people?

*Both.*—We never intermarry with other people.

*Q.*—What is your usual mode of life?

*Atkoor.*—We barter honey, wax, Ippa flowers, Karakkáya tamarinds, and other jungle produce, with the inhabitants of the plains for cloths, grain, tobacco, &c.

*Nundial.*—We sell honey and bees' wax, and hunt wild animals.

*Q.*—Describe the mode of hunting, and show specimens of the snares and traps you use.

*Atkoor.*—We have no snares, &c., but hunt with bows, arrows, and matchlocks.

*Nundial.*—We do not use snares or traps. We shoot bears; but do not kill elephants or tigers.

*Q.*—Do you employ poison to tip the ends of your arrows? If so, send some of the poison, and a list of the herbs and minerals of which it may happen to be composed, and describe the mode of concocting it.

*Atkoor.*—No poison is employed. We sharpen our weapons on a stone, with a mixture of water and salt.

*Nundial.*—We do not use poison.

*Q.*—What is your usual food?

*Atkoor.*—The cooked flesh of the animals we kill, the grain we get in barter; and should these fail, we live upon Kúnda roots, &c.

*Nundial.*—We subsist on honey, Chensu roots, wild herbs, and rice.

*Q.*—Are there any doctors or wise men among you; and what are your medicines?

*Atkoor.*—There are some respectable persons among us, who make decoctions of the leaves and roots of trees, and give them to the sick.

*Nundial.*—We have no doctors. The medicines used by the Hindus are used by us. We do not know of what they are compounded.

*Q.*—Have you any other intercourse besides that of barter with the Hindus of the plains?

*Both.*—None.

*Q.*—Have you any priests or pujaris?

*Both.*—None.

*Q.*—Do you believe in the existence of a God and a soul?

*Atkoor.*—Yes.

*Nundial.*—Cannot say. No one has instructed us in these matters.

*Q.*—When a man dies, does the soul die also?

*Atkoor.*—No; the soul goes to God: others become evil spirits and will appear again.



*Nundial.*—We do not know.

*Q.*—Are men rewarded or punished after death according to their good or evil acts when living?

*Atkoor.*—Yes.

*Nundial.*—We do not know.

*Q.*—What punishment, and who is the inflictor?

*Atkoor.*—The attendants of the keeper of hell (Yama), punish the guilty by converting them into worms and tormenting them in various ways.

*Nundial.*—We cannot say.

*Q.*—What reward, and who is the grantor?

*Atkoor.*—We have heard our elders say that the Supreme Being keeps them in the Holy Regions, where their desires are all attained.

*Nundial.*—Do not know.

*Q.*—What is the place of reward called?

*Atkoor.*—The heaven; the residence of the God Ramasami.

*Nundial.*—We do not know.

*Q.*—Are these punishments and rewards everlasting?

*Atkoor.*—They are not everlasting: when the punishment is at an end the guilty will be born in another state of being, according to his acts: even with regard to the rewarded, they are to remain in the adorned regions only for a limited time, and then to reappear on earth in another shape.

*Nundial.*—We do not know.

*Q.*—Are you ever converted to Mahomedanism or Hinduism?

*Both.*—Never.

*Q.*—What is your language?

*Both.*—It is like that of the Telugus, but differs in pronunciation.

*Q.*—Can any of you read or write?

*Both.*—No.

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